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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM  
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA  
HQ USAF FOR XXXX  
DA WASHDC FOR SASA  
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA  
CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR  
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD  
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO ICD  
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL  
PARIS ALSO FOR POL  
ROME FOR MFO

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E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

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SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:  
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Mideast

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Key stories in the media:  
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Media quoted PM Ehud Olmert and Israeli negotiators as saying that Jerusalem was not discussed during his talks with PA Chairman [President] Mahmoud Abbas on Tuesday. The media quoted the

Palestinians as saying that Jerusalem was discussed. Ha'aretz reported that the sides agreed to expand their negotiations to topics beyond the "core issues": Within two weeks, teams will be set up to discuss at least seven other issues. Olmert and Abbas assigned the heads of the negotiating teams on the core issues -- FM Tzipi Livni and former Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei -- the job of deciding exactly which issues the new task forces should begin discussing, and Livni hopes to reach an agreement with Qurei on this matter soon. Ha'aretz reported that Livni hopes that these negotiations will attract media attention and thereby create a feeling of momentum. One of the most important new issues on which Israel hopes to begin talks is the development of a "culture of peace," with an emphasis on ending incitement to terrorism. Israel would like to reach agreements with the PA on preventing media incitement, encouraging people-to-people activities, and changing parts of the Palestinian school curriculum, which Israel says negates its right to exist. On Sunday, Livni held discussions with representatives of several other government ministries to formulate Israel's positions on these issues. Transportation Minister and former defense minister Shaul Mofaz was quoted as saying in an interview with Israel Hayom that an agreement with Abbas would be dangerous and turn into an Israeli "deposit" to the PA. The Jerusalem Post reported that Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad told the newspaper on Tuesday that if Israel and the Palestinians do not change their behavior faster in the West Bank, they will fail to finalize a peace agreement. Leading electronic media reported that Yasser Abed Rabbo, a member of the Palestinian negotiating team, told Reuters that if they cannot reach a deal with Israel, the Palestinians should consider declaring independence like Kosovo did on Sunday. "If things are not going in the direction of actually halting settlement activities, if things are not going in the direction of continuous and serious negotiations, then we should take the step and announce our independence unilaterally," he was quoted as saying. However, Ha'aretz's web site reported that the chief Palestinian negotiator, Ahmed Qurei, quickly quashed the idea of a unilateral declaration, saying it was never brought before the Palestinian leadership.

The Jerusalem Post reported that defense officials have told the newspaper that the U.S. is reviewing the feasibility of deploying a NATO force in the West Bank as a way to ease IDF security concerns and facilitate an Israeli withdrawal from the area within the coming years. The plan, which is reportedly being spearheaded by U.S. Special Envoy to the region Gen. James Jones, is being floated among European countries, which could be asked to contribute troops to a West Bank multinational force. The Jerusalem Post quoted an official close to Defense Minister Ehud Barak as saying that the deployment of a multinational force in the West Bank could create operational challenges for the IDF if it decided to respond to Palestinian terror attacks following the withdrawal. One of the issues that most concerns Israel is whether under such a withdrawal the IDF would retain its operational freedom in the West Bank, despite the presence of the multinational force.

Yediot reported that Israeli security officials are frustrated with Egypt's attitude towards Hamas. According to this report, Egypt is accused of playing a "double game," in which it arrests Palestinian infiltrators in Sinai on the one hand, but holds covert talks with Hamas on the other. In the same report, Israeli security officials raise concerns about possible Hamas efforts to develop an aerial capability, which could include attempts to develop attack drones.

Ha'aretz reported that a new neighborhood comprising 27 trailers is currently under construction at the settlement of Eli, north of Ramallah, even though PM Ehud Olmert vowed publicly after the Annapolis conference that such construction would cease. Even though some of the trailers are being set up on land privately owned by Palestinians, the authorities are taking no action. Similar unauthorized construction has taken place in the settlement of Maskiot in the northern Jordan Valley.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe cited Hamas's belief that Israelis are buying Palestinian property. The newspaper quoted Palestinian ministers as saying that the land has not been sold to Israelis.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio reported that Amos Gilad, head of the Security-Political Bureau at the Defense Ministry, visited Cairo at the beginning of the week and spoke there with Omar Suleiman, head

of Egyptian intelligence, and Defense Minister Mohamed Hussein Tantawi. The two sides agreed to continue holding talks to resolve the issue of who controls the border crossing at Rafah on the Palestinian side, and on stemming arms smuggling into the Gaza Strip.

Israel Radio quoted the Kuwaiti daily Al-Jarida as saying that Imad Mughniyah's assassination is only the first Israeli move in a series of hits against Hizbullah, Hamas, and Iranian targets.

Ha'aretz reported that on Tuesday an IDF ground unit killed a Palestinian gunman several km east of Dir al-Balah, near Kissufim in the Gaza Strip. Later in the day an IDF force came under mortar fire in the Strip. Palestinians reported that a 7-year-old was killed in crossfire. Also on Tuesday, the Palestinians fired three Qassam rockets on Israeli communities in the western Negev. Yediot reported that two young Israelis have set up a forum on Facebook meant to create worldwide solidarity with the victims of Qassam attacks.

Makor Rishon-Hatzofe quoted National Infrastructure Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer as saying that the West Bank city of Ariel will be part of Israel in any future agreement.

Leading media reported that eight to 15 Knesset members from a broad spectrum of parties will soon embark on a tour of Europe and the Far East to explain the dangers of Iran's nuclear program and urge that sanctions against the Islamic Republic be intensified. Yediot reported that among other things, Israel wants the European countries to prevent Iran from receiving technologies that would allow Iran to develop its gas fields.

Ha'aretz and Israel Radio quoted the BBC as saying that in 2005 British police refrained from arresting a retired IDF general accused of war crimes in Britain: Lawyers acting for Palestinian campaigners lobbied the Metropolitan Police to act on allegations that he had ordered the destruction of more than 50 Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip in 2002. According to the report, Almog stayed on the plane. The BBC said that British police feared an armed confrontation with air marshals or Almog's security details if they stormed the aircraft.

Maariv reported that President Peres will not allow State Comptroller Micha Lindenstrauss and his team to enter his residence, saying that he may not be probed. Lindenstrauss allegedly replied that the President's residence may be investigated. Maariv reported that starting next week the Tel Aviv police will adopt New York's precinct system.

The Jerusalem Post presented the results of an Anti-Defamation League poll finding that one-third of Americans believe that American Jews are more loyal to Israel than to the U.S.

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Mideast:  
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Summary:  
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Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "In the most recent dispute between Israel and the Palestinian Authority about beginning negotiations over Jerusalem, both parties are in the right.... It seems Jerusalem and Ramallah are still trying to figure out how to be not just right, but also clever."

Liberal op-ed writer Uzi Benziman commented in Ha'aretz: "Olmert and his partners in power believe, for some reason, that peace is something you do with trickery."

The ultra-Orthodox Hamodi'a editorialized: "The ambiguity policy under the cover of which the dialogue between Olmert and Abu Mazen is taking place should be viewed as a cover-up ... for the reality that was discussed on Tuesday at the Prime Minister's Office."

Columnist Michael Freund, who was an assistant to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in the conservative, independent

Jerusalem Post: "It is time for Israel to stop looking the other ways whenever the Palestinians assail everything we hold dear. If it is a war of symbols they want, then Israel should not hesitate to respond."

Block Quotes:  
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#### II. "They're Both Right"

Palestinian affairs correspondent Avi Issacharoff wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (2/20): "In the most recent dispute between Israel and the Palestinian Authority about beginning negotiations over Jerusalem, both parties are in the right..... Olmert's rush to the media exposed Abbas and his associates to criticism from their own Fatah movement and the rival Hamas, and they were seen as spineless when it comes to talks with Israel. This led Abbas' advisers and spokesmen to issue a spate of denials regarding any such agreement. All the same, the Palestinians were right when they said that discussions over Jerusalem had not been taken off the agenda. The heads of the negotiation teams, Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni and former Palestinian prime minister Ahmed Qurei, are discussing everything, including Jerusalem. But Palestinian sources say their talks deal in generalizations and that the real negotiations have yet to begin.... But it could be that both leaders, aware of the limits of their power, find it easier to continue negotiations without bringing them to a decisive point on any issue. Abbas and Olmert realize that they won't be able to push through a deal that includes dramatic concessions -- because of Gaza and Shas -- so leaving Jerusalem off the agenda will ensure that the negotiations never reach a dangerous intersection. It seems Jerusalem and Ramallah are still trying to figure out how to be not just right, but also clever."

#### II. "You Can't Make Peace with Tricks"

Liberal op-ed writer Uzi Benziman commented in Ha'aretz (2/20): "When the Prime Minister twists his tongue into knots to assuage the respective suspicions of two groups listening to what he has to say -- Shas on the one hand and Abu Mazen and his colleagues on the other -- he seems more like a tightrope walker who is scared of falling than a clever politician who knows where he is headed. When Olmert declares that today we are not talking with the Palestinians about Jerusalem, he gives the impression of weakness. People listen to him and wonder to themselves: And what about tomorrow? Will this silence about the city's future continue?.... The polls suggest that the majority supports, for the time being, Likud and the other parties on the right. This is also the mood in the Knesset. Therefore, Olmert's political maneuvering will presumably die out on its own. On the other hand, there is a strong likelihood that were the two sides to be presented with a peace plan that offered them a promising future, they would adopt it even though they have their differences -- vis-a-vis one another and also internally -- about each of its central elements. At the heart of this assumption lies the leaders' determination to take a chance, to talk with the enemy, to cut into the most sensitive aspects of the conflict, and ask for the public's trust in their positions. This entails leaders who speak with honesty to the public, who involve it in the details of the negotiations, who expose the difficulties to the people, and don't try to hide the concessions that need to be made. This is not the way things stand in the current Israeli realities: Olmert and his partners in power believe, for some reason, that peace is something you do with trickery."

#### III. "Conflicting Declarations"

The ultra-Orthodox Hamodi'a editorialized (2/20): "All negotiators with the Palestinians should carefully listen to the song coming out of the Muqata in Ramallah. The talk there is about a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital -- nothing less than that. Experience teaches us that the Palestinians' statements are more serious than those of Israeli politicians. Thus, the ambiguity policy under the cover of which the dialogue between Olmert and Abu Mazen is taking place should be viewed as a cover-up ... for the reality that was discussed on Tuesday at the Prime Minister's Office."

#### IV. "Shut Down Orient House"

Columnist Michael Freund, who was an assistant to former prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu, wrote in the conservative, independent Jerusalem Post (2/20): "On Monday, Israel Radio reported that Mahmoud Abbas's Palestinian Authority has chosen to defy the law, which bars it from operating in Jerusalem, by reopening the Orient House.... This is nothing less than a clear Palestinian slap in the face to the Israeli government, which only recently reaffirmed the ban on PA activity in Jerusalem, something to which the Palestinians themselves had agreed in the Oslo Accords. More importantly, though, it is a slap to the people of Israel, the overwhelmingly majority of whom cherish Jerusalem and are against re-dividing the Holy City. And that is precisely why the Palestinians are doing it. They understand the power that symbols have to influence, shape and yes, even to alter reality.... It is time for Israel to stop looking the other way whenever the Palestinians assail everything we hold dear. If it is a war of symbols they want, then Israel should not hesitate to respond. A good place to start would be to tear down the Orient House in Jerusalem, raze the site, and close it once and for all. Similarly, the Muslim Waqf must be held accountable for the damage it causes to the Temple Mount, site of the ancient Jewish Temple.... We simply cannot afford to allow the Palestinians to continue to spit in our faces, and then call it rain. Our foes understand well the importance of symbols. They realize that despite their name, symbols are not merely symbolic, but have substantive value too. The question is, when will we?"

JONES